

361 settlements on the east bank and along the lower
 [161 reaches of the Sobat. Their country is treeless savan-
 191 nah but, unlike their cousins the Nuer and Dinka,
 [101 they are predominantly agricultural and sedentary,
 137 for their long river frontage gives them adequate
 233 water and grazing in the dry season for the com-
 241 paratively few cattle (about 25,000) they possess.¹

The brief account I give of their social structure is mostly derived from articles in *Sudan Notes and Records* by Mr Pumphrey and Mr Howell.²

361 The hamlets (*myer*, sing. *pac*), built from 100
 621 yards to a mile or so apart on high ground parallel to the river, vary in size from one to fifty homesteads; a homestead (*gol*), the residence of a family
 [592 (*gol*), consisting usually of two huts encircled by a fence. Each hamlet is occupied by members of an extended family, or small lineage, with their wives, and the homesteads of this group are arranged in a rough horseshoe shape around a common cattle-byre, which shelters the animals in the rains and is used as a club at all seasons, and
 621 a common kraal. The headman of a hamlet (*jal*
 622 *dwong pac*) who is also the head of a lineage in

● [115] ¹ I am indebted to Mr John Donald of the Sudan Political Service for the most recent figures of human and bovine population.

² M. E. C. Pumphrey, 'The Shilluk Tribe', *S.N. and R.* (1941); P. P. Howell, 'The Shilluk Settlement', *Ibid.* (1941).

RELIGION

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[643]

the shrine since the beginning of the last harvest is made into beer for this occasion. Our Fenikang informants told us that the king should himself come to their village for this rite, and the above short description is mainly from notes made at Fenikang. But, whatever the theory, the usual practice at the present day is for the king to send the animals given to Nyakang to the shrines, and for the *bareth* to pray for rain as they are sacrificed.

● [115]

[793]

We are indebted to Yangjok, one of the most important of the Shilluk chiefs, for the following account of the rain ceremony as it is held at Acop, where stands one of the *kengo Nyakang*. A bullock, or bull, and a hen are killed before the shrine of Nyakang, each animal being killed by one of the *bareth Nyakang*. Before the ceremony the ground within the shrine enclosure and that outside the fence is swept clean by a number of old women. Drums are placed in the open space near the centre of the village and men and women dance vigorously, first holding spears and other weapons, then raising their hands, singing and praising Nyakang. If there is a tree in the open space the sacrificial bullock is tied to it. At the end of the dance the chief of the district pours water, recently brought from the river, into the hollow of his hand, spits into it, and sprinkles the bullock with this. The bullock is speared high up in the flank, so that the wound is not immediately fatal, and is allowed to go free. If he wanders towards the river it is a good sign, and if he falls on his left side, or goes towards the shrine of Nyakang, it is good, but if he falls on his right side it is bad; in theory the bullock should go to the river and come back to die where he was speared, and it seemed that in practice little difficulty was experienced by the practised Shilluk herdsmen in guiding the victim in the right direction. The beast is skinned and cut up where it falls, and the flesh is boiled and eaten by all except pregnant women and their husbands and men and women who have had intercourse during the previous night. Care is taken not to break the bones, which with all fragments are thrown into the river. The head, one forelimb, and the bowels compose the share of the attendants of the shrine, who cook and eat their portions with the rest of the community. The skin is prepared and used as a mat in the hut of Nyakang, where the sacred spear is kept with which the sacrificial animals are killed.

[831]

At the harvest festival it is usual to bring ears of ripening millet and to thrust them into the thatch of certain of the huts constituting

643 I have assumed in the reader some knowledge of these accounts, for the observations which are recorded here are not part of a full and detailed description, but of a note intended to amplify previous records.

643 Although the spirit of Nyikang may appear almost anywhere in Shilluk country and in the numerous shrines which are found there, I think it is safe to assume that, where the new *reth* is concerned, Nyikang disappears at the time of the actual burial of the late *reth*. His spirit appears again in the effigy [778] which is kept at Akurwa, the most important shrine in the country, and remains there pending the final ceremonies of the installation. Until the obsequies of his predecessor are completed, the *reth*-elect is not finally accepted, though [67] [69] he must follow the rules laid down by tradition and must avoid pollution. Theoretically, though this no longer holds true with the administration of the present government, his position may at any time be challenged by a rival and civil war might follow. After the old *reth* has been buried, though the danger [775] from rivals is always present, he has to face the spirit of Nyikang and to undergo the trials to which Nyikang will subject him before he is accepted as a worthy successor and is himself possessed by the spirit. Actual physical danger from other claimants, the danger of an uprising against him, which is never entirely absent throughout his reign, is at its peak, but wanes as each stage is successfully passed. All this is expressed by the conventional attitudes displayed by him and his people and in the ordeals he must undergo. Thus, though there may be no real danger of armed conflict, the situation demands that these conventions be followed and throughout there is an atmosphere of insecurity.

[115] We are here concerned with the election and installation of Kur *trad* Fafiti. As the son of a *reth* who ruled the Shilluk for so long and so successfully and coming immediately after two *reths* whose reigns were short and by no means universally popular, Kur was a likely candidate and it was generally accepted that one of the house of Fafiti was the obvious choice. The Electoral College of chiefs sat at Fashoda immediately after the body of *Duk trad* Fadiet had been immured in the hut at Debwor. Mr. J. L. Baker, who was present, describes the procedure as follows:

"On the 13th May, 1951, the Electoral College sat without further delay as the chiefs wanted a new *reth* quickly owing to the approach of the rains. Also the issue was pretty clear from the outset as, apart from one or two chiefs in Golbainy, the Shilluk were solidly in favour of *nyireth* Kur—a man known to me as a very well-behaved and dignified type, from Bapi behind Kodok. The College on this occasion was ten strong (no Tonga people had arrived, but this was not considered important). The following sat:

1. *jugo* Yorleiker (Gol Dhiang)
2. *jugo* Thabo (Gol Nyikang)
3. *kwanyireth* Cayo (*jung kwareth*)

[113] *There were occasional conspiracies against Fafiti, notably that of Nyawwilo *trad* Kur in 1932. See Pumphrey, M. E. C., *The Shilluk Tribe*, S.N.R. Vol. 24 p. 5.

**jugo jung kwareth*, lit. "the chief of the chiefs of the *kwareth*." The title was apparently given to this branch of the royal house by *reth* Nyakwac.